

EQUALITY WORKING GROUP MEETING

14TH JANUARY 2009

AGREED MINUTES

ATTENDEES: Bob Collins, Equality Commission (Chair)

Lisa McElherron, NICVA

Jim Deery, Ashton Centre

Maeve McLaughlin, Local Govt

Michael Hughes, RCN

Patricia Bray, Disability Action

Thomas Mehaffy, UNISON

Damian Fitzpatrick, DETI

Carly Gordon, NISRA

Jim Jewhurst, DEL

Rae Brown, SEUPB

Peter Millen, DFP

Anne Baker, Secretariat

APOLOGIES: Pamela Dooley, UNISON

Mealla Bratton, Local Govt

Kevin Doherty, Disability Action

Siobhan O'Donoghue, Migrants Rights Centre Ireland

Dale Heaney, OFMDFM

1. Minutes of previous meeting

One request for an amendment to Item 5 of the minutes was received – to formally note that the decision of the EqWG was not to carry out a full EQIA. No other comments were received –the minutes were therefore approved.

2. Action Points

The DFP representative gave an update on the Action Points. He highlighted that NISRA had provided a web link to the ONS news release regarding the revised Sexual Orientation question. The NISRA rep advised that this question will be incorporated in mainstream surveys, therefore consideration

should be given as to whether it should be included in the Equality monitoring questionnaire for comparable purposes. After some discussion it was agreed that it should be included.

Action: DFP

The DFP rep advised the group that concern had been raised regarding the political opinion question to the DFP Minister, who had instructed officials to conduct a review. Therefore the issue of the Equality monitoring questionnaire had been suspended until a decision had been reached. Several options were presented to the Minister with the outcome being that no explicit question should be asked of participants. Where necessary, for Northern Ireland residents, political opinion would be inferred from stated community background. Therefore the Political Opinion question would be removed from the questionnaire.

The Voluntary & Community rep voiced concern that this was not the best method to gather political opinion information, especially in the Border Regions and Scotland.

After some further discussion and concerns over this chosen method, the DFP rep suggested organising a meeting between the Chair and Vice Chair and the EUD Head of Division, to clarify the background and process to this change. The Chair accepted.

Action: DFP

Any developments arising from the meeting will be disseminated to the group.

Action: DFP

3. Work Programme 2008 – draft revised Mainstreaming Equality Guide

The DFP rep noted that the draft had been circulated to the group with the papers. The final version will include some photos.

The Chair made several observations:

- Page 5, para 4 – reason behind listing these categories?

- Guide is process focussed – more emphasis needed on outcomes
- Annex 2 – more information needed on NI Equality duties
- Need to couple S75 duties with Disability duties

The Chair agreed to discuss these ideas and suggest wording with DFP rep.

Action: Chair/DFP rep

The Disability Action rep noted that the distinction between physical access and access to service should be made, and volunteered to forward her ideas.

Action DA rep

The DEL rep suggested incorporating Annex B of the selection process report to highlight evidence of best practice and reviewing outcomes.

The Local Govt. rep suggested that the Equality of Opportunity Public Sector Procurement document should be included in the guidance. The Chair noted this was a footnote but agreed it should be brought forward into the text.

The Disability Action rep suggested noting the other formats the guide was available in at the front of the guide rather than section 8. She also noted there were no text phone numbers for the list of contacts.

The sub-group will discuss and make required amendments to the Guide and circulate to the group.

Action: Sub-group/DFP

4. Work Programme 2008 – report and recommendations from selection sub-group

The RCN rep updated the group on the work of the sub-group. He explained that samples taken from equality answers on application forms tended to be more organisation than project based. The sub-group also examined the training of selection panels with regards to equality and discovered that there

were different methods/levels. From their experience they drew up the template (Annex B in the report) which lists evidence of 'best practice' which would not only assist selectors to evaluate how applicants meet the equality criteria but could also be made available to projects to inform them of the type of activities they should be carrying out to meet the equality criteria.

He advised that the sub-group propose to make a recommendation that the MC mandate the EqWG to work with the MA's to organise equality awareness events for selection panels to discuss their opinions and practice in order to achieve a consistent best practice across all the programmes.

The Vol & Comm rep noted that project promoters could not complete the equality question to the required standard unless they have the guidance and asked what access project promoters would have to this guidance.

The RCN rep suggested that seminars could be held for project promoters to go through the questions on an application form. He suggested, from a MA perspective, that sufficient resources be allocated to the promotion and monitoring of equality.

The Chair agreed the focus should be on the project and the applicant. He noted the need for investment in the monitoring process and agreed the MA's should secure value for money for monitoring, as without monitoring we get less effective outcomes. He noted that the commitment of the applicants was necessary and that equality should not be seen as an 'add on'. It should therefore be made clear to applicants that the equality question is not just a tick box exercise but must be implemented and monitored throughout the project.

The group were happy to endorse the recommendations of the sub-group. The Chair thanked the sub-group for their work.

5. Report from Open Days workshops in Brussels (J Deery)

Jim gave an update on his attendance at 4 workshops. A note of this will be circulated.

Action: DFP

6. AOB

None raised.

7. Date of next meeting

It was agreed to hold the next meeting of the group in late May. The secretariat will canvass dates.

Action: DFP

The Chair thanked NICVA for their hospitality.